Introduction

In 2018, South Korea (Republic of Korea – ROK) and the United States celebrated the sixty-fifth anniversary of the South Korea–United States alliance. The alliance began after the Korean War as US leaders believed they needed to provide a more determined signal of their intent to defend South Korea and stop the spread of communism. Before the North Korean invasion on June 25, 1950, the Truman administration thought its commitment to defend South Korea was sufficient, given the threat and South Korea's overall importance to US interests. Once the war began, US leaders were convinced the invasion had been masterminded in Moscow and Beijing, and was the first challenge by the post–World War II monolithic communist threat. As a result, the North Korean assault quickly pushed the importance of defending South Korea to become a far higher priority than had been the case before the war.

After the war and the conclusion of an armistice, the United States implemented a security commitment to South Korea that included four dimensions. First, South Korea and the United States concluded a Mutual Defense Treaty. The security clause contained in Article III stated that in the event of an armed attack on either party, both "would act to meet

the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."[1] Second, the United States supplied large amounts of military and economic aid to rebuild South Korea after the war and helped the country develop the military capability to defend itself. From 1955 to 1967, South Korea received over $5.8 billion in US grants and loans for military and economic assistance. As the South Korean economy grew, US aid changed to direct credits and loans, providing $2.4 billion to purchase military equipment. Third, the United States maintained two combat divisions in South Korea, deployed close to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) along the two likely invasion corridors into the South. As South Korea's military capabilities grew, the United States reduced the number of its troops: at the time of writing there are 28,500 US troops stationed in South Korea. In addition, these forces are concentrated in two hub locations, having returned over 50 bases and thousands of acres of valuable real estate to South Korea. Finally, in 1958, Washington deployed tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea and included it under the US nuclear umbrella.[2] Accordingly, the United States declared its willingness to use nuclear weapons to defend its ally. After some time, US military leaders began to question the wisdom of having nuclear weapons in South Korea. In addition, the end of the Cold War and the growing North Korean nuclear crisis

[1] "Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea," The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, October 1, 1953, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp.

[2] Terence Roehrig, "Nuclear Weapons and Extended Deterrence: The US Nuclear Umbrella over South Korea," *Political Science Quarterly* 132:4 (2017–2018), 650–81.

created other motivations for removing these weapons. Consequently, by December 1991, the United States completed the withdrawal of all nuclear weapons from the peninsula.

The genesis of the South Korea–United States alliance arose from security concerns to protect South Korea from another invasion and to maintain peace and stability in Northeast Asia. As a result, deterrence was the primary reason for the alliance. Given that the United States has been a dominant global player since World War II, the nature of the alliance was a patron–client relationship in which Washington provided the lion's share of ROK's security. With rapid economic development, however, South Korean capabilities, ambitions, and confidence grew and South Korea began to take on a greater share of its own defense. Seoul also joined global players to work in a broader array of regional and international initiatives to promote its interests while contributing to global collective security. Some examples include contributions to UN peacekeeping operations and foreign aid programs, hosting the G20 and Nuclear Security Summit in 2012, and joining counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. With these changes, Seoul and Washington have sought to change the nature of the alliance to more of a partnership.

Reflecting this desire, in 2009, Presidents Barack Obama and Lee Myung-bak signed a Joint Vision statement that called for "building an Alliance to ensure a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula, the Asia-Pacific region, and the world."[3] The Joint Vision called

[3] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. "Joint Vision for the Alliance of the United States of American and the Republic of Korea," June 16, 2009,

for a strong partnership across politics, economics, and security that moved beyond a focus solely on regional security to a "comprehensive global strategic alliance." Thus, the main objective of this book is to analyze how the South Korea–United States alliance has evolved over the past 60 years, focusing on three key areas: (1) North Korean threat assessment and deterrence; (2) the role of the United States in South Korea's transition to democracy and its impact on the alliance; and (3) South Korea's economic growth and its effects on the South Korea–United States economic relationship.

The South Korea–United States alliance started because of security concerns, as Washington wanted to stop the spread of communism. As time passed, however, the nature of the threat changed. During the Korean War and the early years of the defense commitment, US leaders viewed the threat in Korea as part of a communist coalition that included Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang. As the years passed, the Sino–Soviet dispute weakened the notion of a monolithic communist threat, and the Soviet Union was no longer interested in another conflict in Korea. During the 1960s, US leaders continued to view China as a serious concern, but by the next decade even Beijing was viewed with less worry, and North Korea's confidence in these allies began to wane. By the 1970s, the chief concern for the South Korea–United States alliance was a conventionally armed North Korea that certainly had the capability to upset regional peace, but it did not have the capability to reach the US homeland.

https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/joint-vision-alliance-united-states-america-and-republic-korea.

Thus, Washington could issue any number of threats to retaliate in response to North Korean aggression, with no concern for direct North Korean strikes on the United States. Pyongyang could reach US military bases in South Korea and Japan with conventionally armed rockets and missiles, but this was very different to reaching the US homeland. As North Korea's nuclear weapons program has grown, along with the development of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) armed with a nuclear warhead, the possibility of nuclear retaliation against the continental United States is back in play, changing the dynamics of the extended deterrence commitment. Consequently, the possibility of decoupling, whereby the United States might hesitate to strike North Korea for fear of nuclear retaliation, has again become a point of discussion among analysts of the alliance.[4]

At the same time, with the end of the Cold War, South Korea normalized its relationship with the Soviet Union/Russia and China, and it is obvious that neither China nor Russia wants another war on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea and China expanded their economic relationship, and since 2003 China has been South Korea's largest trading partner. As a result, South Korea's export dependence on China is increasing, while at the same time it relies on the United States for its security. Thus, the future of United States–China relations will have a considerable impact on the South Korea–United States alliance.

[4] Brad Roberts, *The Case for US Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 66–7.

South Korea also transitioned to democracy in 1987. At several points prior to the transition, Washington had opportunities to assist with democratization, but it opted not to, fearing the instability that might result.[5] Democratization in South Korea meant both countries were aligned with similar political and economic systems and values, making it easier to work together. At the same time, democratization introduced freedom of speech and leadership changes, resulting in leadership that alternated between conservative and progressive administrations that caused friction with the United States as well. Democracy allowed South Koreans to more easily express anti-American sentiment and for progressive politicians in South Korea to interpret national interests differently from conservatives, placing less value on the alliance. As a result, there have been serious disagreements between Seoul and Washington when the United States had a Republican president in office and South Korea had a progressive president.

Finally, South Korea's rapid economic growth generated a broader array of interests and provided its leaders with increased foreign policy tools to achieve its goals. For example, South Korea's economic wealth allowed for building a stronger military and increasing its role in the international arena. At the same time, economic growth introduced unexpected issues, such as a trade deficit with the United States. To deal with this issue, the two countries enacted a free trade agreement (the Korea–US Free Trade Agreement, KORUS

[5] Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

FTA), which entered into force in March 2012. However, controversies remain regarding the agreement as the US trade deficit with South Korea has increased since the FTA came into effect, and the Trump administration is seeking to amend or renegotiate the agreement.

In summary, the South Korea–United States alliance, which once was largely a regional security relationship, has changed and now looks beyond the security of the Korean Peninsula as its sole focus. The two countries cooperate on regional and global security issues, but they are also important trade partners. Given the more than 60-year relationship, it is not surprising that there have been changes between the two parties. As a result, the alliance has shifted to a relationship that resembles more of a partnership with a broader set of goals and interests that go beyond only the security of the Korean Peninsula, and which has South Korea assuming a greater share of its own defense.

Using alliance theory, deterrence theory, and development power theory as the theoretical frameworks, this book will examine the changes that have occurred in the South Korea–United States alliance, the causes and motivations for the changes, and the future direction of the alliance. In particular, this study will address the following questions:

- How has the alliance changed over the past decades, and what factors have precipitated these changes? What are the implications of these changes for alliance theory?
- How have ROK and US threat perceptions changed over the years and how have these assessments affected the alliance?

- What role has South Korea's rise (economics, politics, and military capabilities) played in changing alliance relations and dynamics?
- To what degree is the South Korea–United States alliance more than a relationship that is solely concerned with security? What role do economics play in the alliance relationship?
- What vision do ROK and US leaders have for the future of the alliance? Are these visions compatible?

The literature on alliances is extensive. Many studies have examined the causes of alliance formation and the reasons alliances survive or disintegrate.[6] A central finding in these works is that a driving force behind alliance formation and survival is the response to an external threat or, in the case of alliance termination, an altered threat environment. Rajan Menon argues that is exactly why US Cold War alliances have outlived their usefulness and should be discarded.[7] For realist scholars, alliance behavior has been central to their arguments on balancing behavior in the face of exogenous threats.[8] The alliance literature also has a

[6] See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[7] Rajan Menon, *The End of Alliances* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Ted Galen Carpenter and Doug Bandow, *The Korean Conundrum: America's Troubled Relationship with North and South Korea* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[8] John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2003); Steve Chan, *Looking for Balance: China, the United States, and Power Balancing in East Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford

plethora of studies on individual alliances as case studies of alliance behavior. Scholars have shown particular interest in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Warsaw Pact alliance, and the United States–Japan alliance.[9] Some studies have examined the US system of bilateral alliances in Asia as a cluster of alliance relationships in lieu of a larger multilateral alliance.[10] Many of these studies are policy studies that examine the current state of the relationships and their future as part of the regional security architecture.

Most significant for this project is the literature on the South Korea–United States alliance. Several books have been published recently that address different aspects of the alliance, including Scott Snyder's *The US–South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* ; Gi-Wook Shin's *One Alliance, Two Lenses: US–Korea Relations in a New Era*; and Katharine H. S. Moon's *Protesting America: Democracy and*

University Press, 2013); David Arase and Tsuneo Akaha (eds.), *The US–Japan Alliance: Balancing Soft and Hard Power in East Asia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

[9] Lawrence Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Gulner Aybet and Rebecca R. Moore (eds.), *NATO in Search of a Vision* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010); Kent E. Calder, *Pacific Alliance: Reviving US–Japan Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

[10] Michael H. Armacost and Daniel I. Okimoto, *The Future of America's Alliances in Northeast Asia* (Stanford, CA: Asia Pacific Research Center, 2004) and Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States–Korea–Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

the US–Korea Alliance.[11] Individually, these works address important issues that relate to future directions of the alliance and how identity and perception shape alliance relations and politics. However, these efforts are largely focused on a specific dimension of the alliance.

Despite this extensive body of work on alliances and the South Korea–United States alliance in particular, we believe this book will make important contributions to the literature in two ways. First, in contrast to the many examinations of the South Korea–United States alliance that focus on particular aspects of the relationship, this book will be a comprehensive study that addresses history, economics, security, alliance structure, politics, and the future of the alliance. To our knowledge, there are no recent studies of the alliance that seek to address all of these crucial issues. Second, we believe this project will make an important contribution to alliance theory. Many previous studies have examined why alliances form, what causes them to endure or dissolve, and how they function within security environments. Most of this analysis focuses on exogenous factors, but few have examined how alliances change and adapt as a result of endogenous factors, particularly how the power relations spurred by the economic growth and political development of junior partners have affected the alliance, a concept we call *development*

[11] Scott Snyder (ed.), *The US–South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2012); Gi-Wook Shin, *One Alliance, Two Lenses: US–Korea Relations in a New Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Katharine H. S. Moon, *Protesting America: Democracy and the US–Korea Alliance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).